

DEVELOPING MASTERS OF STREAMS FROM PREK – GRADE 8:

SETTING EVERY CHILD UP FOR SUCCESS

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### Abstract

This paper is a passionate call to action to address one question: How can public schools eliminate the predictable and persistent achievement gaps that exist in education? In Texas, San Antonio remains academically the most challenging area for public education (Malik & McBride, 2019). With huge unmet needs among Hispanic and Black students (97%), barely 10% of elementary school children can think critically and solve problems in familiar and unfamiliar situations (7Cs Academy, 2020). Driving 90 minutes North to Austin, this minority (63%) continues to struggle while white and Asian students (34%) perform three times better (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Such huge disparities in academic outcomes can only be addressed by explicitly teaching knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all children need to succeed. Believing education is a team sport, we asked families what improvements they would like to see in public schools. Families wanted to see a significant improvement in children's compassion, kindness, global citizenship, community, languages, open mindedness, respect, responsibility, work ethic, and STEM in our Academy Survey (Balasubramanian, 2020). These are great values and understandings that every child can build upon to achieve the dreams of their families.

This paper describes our multifaceted intervention plan for effectively delivering whole child education by building on an evidence-based practice called Designing Learning (Balasubramanian, Frieler, & Asp, 2008). By adding a developmental educational model to Designing Learning (DL), Designing Learning 2.0 explicitly focuses on higher-level literacy and numeracy skills to build intellectual, human, and moral character virtues in children. The model is best visualized as a triangle, with knowledge, skills, and attitudes on each side. By delivering whole child education using the seven "C's" (7Cs): creativity, character, competencies,

communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and citizenship from the triangle model, DL 2.0 delivers significantly improved student outcomes.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has amplified the achievement gaps. Achieving desired outcomes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, requires a systemic and complex intervention like DL 2.0. DL 2.0 contextualizes learning with dilemma stories from the beginning to build children's conative skills. The stories are crafted with a STREAMS\* focus to build purpose-filled actions by students to develop fine MASTERS (anagram intended) of STREAMS.

To deeply motivate and engage every child in the COVID-19 era, we need stronger parent-student-teacher centric approaches. Educators must build on children's developmental assets and the cultural wealth within their communities to create deep learning experiences steeped in universal intellectual, human, and moral character virtues like the 7Cs. We have begun working with teachers to craft sample curriculum around the 7Cs character virtues and values of our community to bring greater meaning and purpose to education.

We know every child, even in disadvantaged communities, can thrive when high-quality curriculum is used to deliver effective instruction after training educators with professional learning. Community support helps. We share specific tools and resources that stakeholders can use to build on our collective wisdom to come out stronger on performance-based outcomes on the other side of this global pandemic.

\*STREAMS = Science Technology Reading Engineering Arts Mathematics Social studies

### **Inequities in Education**

For almost two decades now, I have been asking one question. How can public schools eliminate the predictable and persistent achievement gaps that exist in education? I first encountered these inequities when I started teaching at a Title I (predominantly low-income) middle school in Colorado in 2003. As an immigrant to the United States (US) in June 2002, this is not what I had expected. I imagined things might be different after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). I believe a child's race ethnicity, socio-economic status, giftedness and learning needs (exceptionalism), or English language proficiency should not limit their access to receiving a high-quality education. With their push for equity and opportunity, educators globally have been interested in educating the whole child. In the documentary, *Equality: 1950-1980* (Mondale & Patton, 2001), historian James Anderson reminds us that the best ideas about public education have not really been tried yet because we spend so much time resisting the idea and eventually get tired of them. To better address global parental needs, I propose here an innovative, developmental education model that builds on a proven, evidence-based practice called Designing Learning (Balasubramanian, Frieler, & Asp, 2008) to address fundamental questions, such as:

- *How do we teach our children the values and understandings that they need to succeed in life?*
- *How do we help our children excel in the things that they do?*
- *How do we help our children live purposefully?*

This paper describes the first mile in our marathon quest to design a relatively large system that seeks to set every child up for success. We have chosen to focus on a high-poverty neighborhood in San Antonio. We continue to see huge unmet needs for students at public schools in the city. San Antonio remains academically the most challenging major metropolitan area for public education in Texas (Malik & McBride, 2019). Over 97 percent of students

(Hispanic and African American) are underrepresented groups in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Over 90 percent of the students are poor and a majority experience generational poverty. The Texas Education Agency (<https://tea.texas.gov/>) has identified over 75 percent of the students to be at-risk in San Antonio.

Foundations Matter! Children need a strong foundation, starting in Prekindergarten (PreK). Literacy, numeracy, and social emotional character development (SECD) should be non-negotiable competencies for every child. The Board of Directors of 7CsThrive and I are new entrants to the public charter school sector. We are proposing the opening of *7Cs Academy*, a PreK to eighth grade public charter school, to serve families in the Westside of San Antonio from fall 2022. *Edgewood Independent School District (ISD)*, the plaintiff in a landmark case on public school finance in 1984, remains a property-poor school district on the Westside of San Antonio (National Center for Education Statistics, 1989). The plaintiff in *Edgewood ISD v. Kirby* prevailed in the lawsuit and has helped ensure greater parity in school funding since 1993. The Texas Legislature continues to work on ensuring greater parity in school funding across the state. Clearly, money alone has been unable to address the predictable and persistent achievement gaps that continue to exist in Edgewood and beyond. As new entrants to the charter sector, the Board and I are interested in opening our first high-quality charter school, *7Cs Academy*, in August 2022 with our innovative design.

To compound the problems of poverty, the global COVID-19 pandemic has brought focus to another forgotten pandemic that has been in our midst for several decades now. We have known about this pandemic from student performance on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) annual education test from the 37 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and OECD's many other partner countries. The PISA test is

a measure of a 15-year-old student's essential knowledge and skills to be productive members of society. As of 2018, unlike Poland or the United Kingdom, student performance in reading, math, and science based on PISA 2018 (<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>) has continued to remain flat in many countries, including the United States. Between 2000 and 2006, student performance in Poland went from below average to above average for the developed world on the PISA test (Ripley, 2013). Poland has a GDP of 605 billion US dollars. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a measure of the net economic activity in every country. Poland's annual expenditure in Prekindergarten (PreK) to 12<sup>th</sup> grade public education is 5 percent of their GDP. UK, in comparison, spends 4.2 percent of their GDP (2.9 trillion US dollars) on PreK-12 education. In the United Kingdom (UK), student performance in reading and math has increased significantly from 2006 to 2018 on the PISA test.

The United States (US) spends over 700 billion US dollars annually on PreK—12<sup>th</sup> grade public education (USDOE, 2019). This annual expenditure is 3.6 percent of the US GDP (19 trillion US dollars). The US alone has spent over 14 trillion US taxpayer dollars from 2000 to 2018! In April 2020, 62 superintendents from across the nation (CGCS, 2020) wrote to lawmakers on Capitol Hill, seeking 175 billion additional dollars for an Educational Stabilization Fund to counter the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US. While they sought this investment, the superintendents cited a National Bureau of Economic Research study which found that “38 percent of the variance in (economic) growth-rate changes can be explained by test score changes” in 15 OECD countries. These 62 school districts have billions of US dollars of annual revenue on their general fund per their Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). Every one of these organizations will confirm that there are not enough dollars to serve unmet needs of students in each of these communities. I worked at one of these multibillion-

dollar organizations as the head of Strategy and Continuous Improvement for five years and was tasked with monitoring and reporting on annual student academic outcomes. I believe taxpayer resources must be considered as a sacred investment in the future of our communities. I have been constantly thinking about how we might begin to optimize people, time, and monetary resource allocations at each of these organizations to begin to transform them into actual investments in these communities.

Families in the US are increasingly dissatisfied with the Social, Economic, Moral, and Intellectual outcomes (SEMI outcomes) of public education. On average, over half (52 percent) have been dissatisfied with the quality of education students received in K—12<sup>th</sup> grade in the US since 1999 (Gallup, 2019). I believe it is our moral imperative to act on these perceptions as educators, even if there were a grain of truth to these perceptions. Kinney (2009) in his popular children’s book series *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* parodies:



Fig. 1. Kinney’s (2009) parody on public education

OK, so maybe I AM lazy, but it’s not really my fault. I’ve been lazy ever since I was a little kid, and if someone had caught it early on, maybe I wouldn’t be the way I am now. I remember in preschool, when playtime was over, the teacher would tell everyone to put away their toys, and we would all sing the “Cleanup Song” while we did it. Well, I sang the song with everyone else, but I didn’t do any of the actual cleaning. So if you want to find somebody to blame for the way I am, I guess you’d have to start with the public education system (pp. 69-70).

Additionally, less than one in three high school students (32 percent) from the Class of 2011 completed a post-secondary credential upon graduating from a high school in Texas. The Agency defines retention rate as the percentage of students enrolled in the fall of a given school year who were enrolled in the same grade in the previous school year. In Texas, four times more students were retained and required to repeat Grade 9 (7.2 percent) compared to Kindergarten (KG). In KG, 1.7 percent of the children were not promoted and required to repeat kindergarten. Psychologist, Albert Bandura's research (1997) and our own life experiences have taught us that the "choices" children make during the formative years of their development shape their future. We agree with Kristjánsson's (2020) assessment that grade attainment and high achievement in PISA scores cannot be the be-all and end-all of education. Rather it must be helping students flourish and lead purposeful lives.

Could learning be better designed from the early grades to set children up for success in secondary schools and beyond? Solutions, like the Primary Years Program (PYP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Montessori education have achieved some success. Students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century require more personalized instruction to motivate and inspire them (Balasubramanian, Wilson, & Cios, 2006). My classroom practice showed me that every student subgroup can be better motivated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with guided-inquiry, hands-on learning approaches that build on evidence from cognitive and neuroscience theories. While I was in the trenches, I developed the Designing Learning model (Balasubramanian, Frieler, & Asp, 2008). The model is based on research on how people learn. It was effective in consistently delivering two or more years of annual academic growth for every student subgroup. The next section briefly describes both components of the model.



**Designing Learning (DL) and Designing Learning 2.0 (DL 2.0)**

The first component in our multifaceted intervention plan describes my embodied theory with an assessment-driven, technology-infused set of activities and protocols that first identifies the needs of learners. It uses a backwards-design approach and begins with prewriting and pretesting (step 1) for targeted and intentional high-quality instruction. It includes an iterative cycle of well-designed diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments as illustrated (Fig. 2).

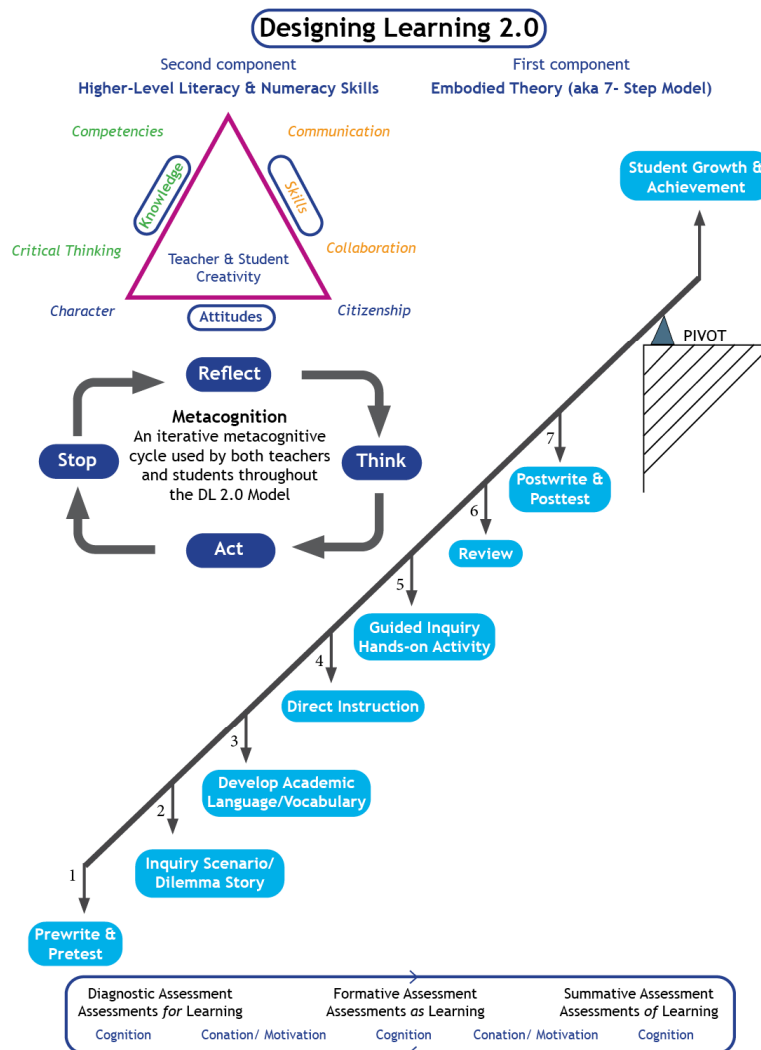


Fig. 2. The Designing Learning model

The iterative metacognitive cycle in the Designing Learning models and the embodied theory (7-step model) build on Kolb's experiential learning cycle for differentiation in the classroom.

Students have multiple learning opportunities to practice with our guided learning inquiry model.

The second component in the original Designing Learning model explicitly taught students critical thinking, problems solving, mathematical reasoning, inference making, and visualization/modeling—what we called higher-level literacy skills. As a classroom teacher, I was focused on cognition and building student competencies. It was not until I became an administrator 12 years ago that I began seeing the benefits of conation, instinctive actions, and their interactions with student-teacher-parent partnerships to further motivate adults. Over the past few years, I have broadened the second component in the Designing Learning Model to include both higher-level literacy and higher-level numeracy skills.

The intentional metacognition in the Designing Learning models also help students examine different perspectives to develop their reasoning and problem-solving abilities. This wisdom in turn confers valuable societal benefits (Grossmann, et. al., 2020). The Core Principles (see next section) which builds on our success with the Designing Learning models (Balasubramanian, 2007), facilitates students' cognitive, emotional, and social development. It addresses any gaps that all students, including at-risk students, have on executive function, social and emotional learning (SEL), and soft skills—even as early as PreK. Executive functions (Diamond, 2012) impact every aspect of human life from: physical health, mental health, school readiness, and school success. Executive functions can and must be explicitly taught to all children, including at-risk children. It is a method by which we raise expectations for goal-oriented action. Social and emotional learning (SEL) describes the processes through which humans acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand and manage

emotion, set and achieve goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2017). SEL must be explicitly taught to all children, including at-risk children. Soft skills describe how people think, feel, and act in school and beyond. Teaching all children soft skills, including at-risk children is “putting the horse before the cart” because it brings meaning and purpose to education.

### **Core Principles and 7Cs Triangle Model**

The inequities in education and their implications have been well known. I contend that it is not for a lack of intention these problems have remained stubborn. The virtues of Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, & Socrates have been unrivaled. The advances of humankind using methods of modern logic over the past 400 years have been unmatched. Opportunities remain for unleashing the power of collaboration to address persistent problems of our times, including PreK through 12<sup>th</sup> grade public education.

In the design of our school, we build on the ideas of two brilliant American philosophers, Charles Sanders Pierce, and John Dewey. Pierce (1882) best articulated how a general training of the mind and the art of thinking are both indispensable to the underlying methods of modern logic. Dewey (1933) recommended that educators must weave the moral qualities of character with principles and processes of logic to better meet the needs of every child. Character education helps develop a child’s psychological traits, their attitudes and dispositions, which tend to be stable, relevant, and enduring. The logic of thinking develops a child’s psychological states and aptitudes, their knowledge and skills, on which children can be rigorously trained over time.

The Core Principles in our Academy with the trio of knowledge, skills, and attitudes on each side is best visualized with the help of a triangle (Fig. 3) to make learning relevant and

rigorous. Parents have helped us brand these Core Principles as the Triangle Model. The Triangle Model represents our outcomes-driven approach to whole child education. The Model focuses on

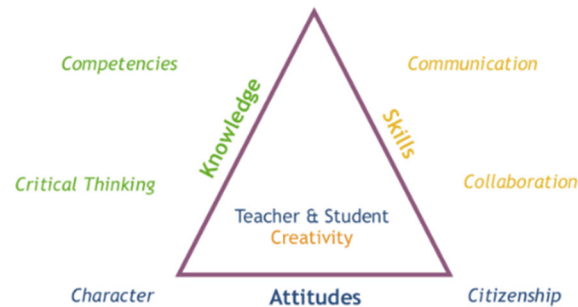


Fig. 3. Core Principles and 7Cs Triangle Model

student’s intellectual, human, and moral character development. It provides teachers and students with a clear rationale for “why” high-quality teaching and learning matters. The Triangle Model collectively fortifies the art of thinking with the science of virtues using the craft of collaboration, mediated by teacher and student creativity. With this developmental model, children will acquire new skillsets and mindsets. These skillsets and mindsets will be both inward and outward focused.

Knowledge in our schools build student’s ‘*Critical thinking*’ and ‘*Competencies*’ with a distinct science, technology, reading, engineering, arts, mathematics, and social studies (STREAMS) focus (see Sample Dilemma Story). Children develop the *art of thinking* with knowledge. Critical thinking and Competencies anchor children’s intellectual development. Knowledge builds children’s intellectual character virtues. Skills at our Academy build children’s ‘*Communication*’ and ‘*Collaboration*’ skills. Children develop the *craft of collaboration* with skills. Communication and Collaboration expand children’s human development. Skills build children’s human character virtues. Attitudes in 7Cs Academy is about building children’s ‘*Character*’ and ‘*Citizenship*.’ Children develop their *science of virtues* with attitudes. Character and Citizenship ground children’s moral development. Attitudes build

children's moral character virtues. At the center of this triangle sits teacher and student relationships to kindle and nurture their '*Creativity*.' These seven "C's" (7Cs) collectively make up the 7Cs Triangle Model. The 7Cs virtues of Character, Competencies, Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Citizenship, are timeless. These distinctive 7Cs virtues is what we call Core Principles at the Academy. As Baehr (2015) describes, these intellectual virtues are character traits that flow from a love of learning. Children will become avid learners, embracing challenge and mastery of the 7Cs virtues in our proposed PreK through Grade 8 public charter school.

Every child who graduates from 7Cs Academy will be inspired to think critically, solve problems, and seek to improve their communities. This is our everyday *Mission*. 'Growing People' and 'Building Futures' is the *Tagline* of 7Cs Academy. It reflects our commitment to maximize human potential. The Board of Directors and I summarized the improvements that families sought into *Our Core Values* – graciousness, resilience, accountability, curiosity, and excellence. Since each of these words might mean different things to different people, every Director selected one core value that they would champion within our community. For example, one Director selected graciousness. She crafted this real-world story to illustrate what it meant.

Luis (pseudonym) demonstrates graciousness. He graduated from Weimar High School in 2011. Like our 31st President, Herbert Hoover, Luis was orphaned early. He was raised by his aunts and uncles. Yet, Luis' graciousness combines his awareness of social norms with a genuine consideration of the feelings of others. Luis' goodwill shows in how he expresses his kindness in sensitive and creative ways through the ebbs and flows of life.

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, scientists thought bumblebees should not be able to fly because of their large bodies and small wings. We not only know that bumblebees can fly, but now know that alpine bumblebees can fly above Mt. Everest (Dillon & Dudley, 2014). Consequently, the *Mascot* of 7Cs Academy is the bumblebee. Regardless of their learning needs and background,

every child in 7Cs Academy will be able to soar with their bumblebee pride. Ably supported by 7Cs Academy's everyday Mission, Tagline, Core Values, and Mascot, we will achieve our *Vision* of developing socially responsible citizens. Principles of social responsibility to promote common good include accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, and respect for stakeholder interests (ISO 26000, 2011). As I began exploring holistic education in China, I learned a critical insight, *Li de shu ren*, meaning "develop people by cultivating character and virtues" from Yan's e-mail to me (Y. Huo, personal communication, November 1, 2020). This quote also honors our parents' wishes to cultivate global citizenship that remains a goal across continents.

We are confident that children from the Academy will thrive as socially responsible citizens decades from now is because we have mapped the 7Cs to what we call "7P" long-term, performance-based, student outcomes. One can argue that the 7Cs are interdependent, just like the 7Ps. However, starting with the end in mind on performance-based student outcomes, we want children graduating from 7Cs Academy to be good at achieving all 7Cs and great in delivering at least four of the 7Ps. The seven "P's" are People, Passion, Positive outlook, Purpose, Process, Persuasiveness, and Power. We mapped the 7Cs Citizenship to 'People;' Character to 'Positive outlook;' Critical thinking to 'Purpose;' Competencies to 'Process;' Communication to 'Persuasiveness;' Creativity to 'Passion;' and Collaboration to 'Power.' Positive outlook is a nonnegotiable performance-based student outcome for every graduate of 7Cs Academy. A second Director who selected the core value of resilience, connected this nonnegotiable performance-based student outcome to Catalina's (pseudonym) real-world story. Catalina has gone through a lot in life. As Catalina affirms:

You cannot control what happens to you. You can only control how you react to it. The choices you make, can make you better or they can make you bitter. It is your choice.

Catalina demonstrates resilience by making choices that make her better every day. Catalina's resilience is also reflected in the everyday attitude of Icelanders. I learned about their motto recently from speaking with an Icelandic, Karen, on a zoom meeting (K. Jordan, personal communication, October 31, 2020). Icelanders live by their resilient attitude, *Theta Redust (Petta reddast)*, meaning "things will always work out well in the end if we look positively toward the future." Beset with extreme poverty, harsh and long storm-filled winters, and volcanic eruptions, over 342,000 Icelanders have managed to thrive on their barely inhabitable rocky island on the Northern Atlantic Ocean for generations. The positive outlook of our graduates from 7Cs Academy will bestow greater wisdom on everyone. This wisdom will help them flourish and lead purposeful lives (Kristjánsson, 2020).

Every child graduating from 7Cs Academy is expected to make choices that continuously make them better human beings. This attitude and mindset will be modeled by everyone at the Academy. We know every child can become great in at least three of the remaining six "P's." That is why we tell parents: "send your child to 7Cs Academy for ten years. We will make them educated and productive members of society by eighth grade." Operationally, we define "educated" as a child mastering grade level content in the early years. We define "productive" as a child making at least a year's worth of academic growth every year.

In the sections that follow, we describe how the *7Cs Curriculum* will teach the distinctive 7Cs virtues to students from PreK to build healthy intellects, healthy minds, and healthy bodies. First, we anchor and personalize learning within the context of dilemma stories at 7Cs Academy. These dilemma stories are designed to promote deep thought and reflection to ensure students become wise and make better choices. Over 96 percent of wisdom scientists agree that wisdom can be cultivated and is malleable (Grossmann, et. al., 2020). The stories contribute to children's

intellectual, human, and moral character development.

### Sample Dilemma Story

Building on the insight of Clayton Christensen, the guru of disruptive innovation, we will inspire everybody to "be anxiously engaged in a good cause" at 7Cs Academy. Anchoring children's learning using dilemma stories (*adivinanzas* in Spanish, *énigmes* in French, *Rätselfragen* in German, or *conundrums* in English) from the early years teaches them an important lesson that life is all about choices. As Bascom (1975) describes, the choices are often difficult because the stories present an unresolved issue that is to be debated, discussed, reflected, and eventually acted on. Bascom, citing Nassau (1915), shares a short dilemma story from Gabon, Africa. (p. 83).

Fire claimed it was greater than Water because without it no food could be cooked. Water replied that it was greater because without it, there would be nothing to drink. People were tired of their endless, repetitious dispute. They went into council to settle the argument. They decided that the two were equal and they should cease their dispute (1975, p. 83).

Bascom (1975) uses this story to make his point that the appearance of inanimate objects as characters is also found in other African folktales.

Here is a contemporary dilemma story crafted by the author based on his personal experience to illustrate the STREAMS focus of 7Cs Academy. This story, relevant to the quantity of clean water available on this planet, was inspired by the author's interactions with his paternal grandfather almost 40 years ago with reactions like Juan in this story. The fictional characters in my illustrative dilemma story are Grandpa Ruben and his two grandchildren, Gabriella and Juan. Grandpa Ruben speaks candidly to his grandchildren to instill in them a sense of responsibility. The facts in this story come from <https://census.gov>, the Siemens-Stiftung Media Portal (2020), and an article in the New York Times (Sengupta & Cai, 2019).



Grandpa Ruben began his story: "The year was 2005. There were 6.5 billion people in the world, like you, Gabriella, and Juan, and me. Five percent of them suffered from a shortage of water. That's 325 million people." Grandpa Ruben went on. "That's almost the entire population of the United States. Can you imagine our entire country without water?" Grandpa Ruben asked. Juan did not seem to care much about Grandpa Ruben's story, but Gabriella seemed interested. Grandpa Ruben continued, the population in October 2020, is 7.69 billion people.

Juan asked: "How do you know that grandpa?" "I always verify with <https://census.gov>" Grandpa Ruben replied. Juan was impressed. "It's a real time population clock grandpa," he exclaimed! "I'm glad that it excites you, *Juanito*," Grandpa Ruben reflected. "That's cool grandpa," Gabriella chimed in. "Yes, *Gabriellita*, and I predict that by 2025 there will be over 8.1 billion people."

Noticing that both Gabriella and Juan were now engaged, Grandpa Ruben continued, "did you know that according to some forecasts, over 3 billion people are likely to suffer from water shortage in just six short years?" Juan was deep in thought. Gabriella wanted to know more about Grandpa's prediction. "Why is that Grandpa?" Gabriella asked.

Grandpa Ruben answered that "there are both natural and artificial causes for this, *Gabriellita*. A lack of precipitation is one cause. You know what precipitation is, *Juanito*?" Yes Grandpa, Juan replied. "It is rain, hail, or even snow when the clouds in the sky chooses to open up, Grandpa." Beaming proudly, Grandpa Ruben said: "You are both caring children and I am so proud of you both, *mi Juanito y mi Gabriellita*."

Gabriella was still curious. "Is that the only reason, Grandpa?" "Low ground water reserves is a second major natural cause, *mija*" Grandpa Ruben answered. "In our lovely city, San Antonio, Edwards Aquifer is our groundwater source. Unfortunately, ground water pollution

and wrong uses of land are man-made causes.", Grandpa Ruben concluded his story, "*mi chiquita, al fin.*"

How will you respond to Grandpa Ruben's story, if you were in Gabriella or Juan's place? Knowing what you know now about the looming water crisis from Grandpa Ruben's story, what are you going to do? Why?

Everything in our Academy stems from our commitment to intellectual, human, and moral character development. We embrace developmental psychologist, Marvin Berkowitz's definition of "Character" as the first "C" at 7Cs Academy because as he puts it, character includes everything that leads people to do the right thing or not do the right thing. Professor Berkowitz (2002) defines character, a psychological trait, as "*an individual's set of psychological characteristics that affect that person's inclination and ability to perform morally*" (p. 48). Children are hardwired knowing what is right. Prior to formal schooling, children have the right knowledge, skills, and attitude. Like fully functioning persons (Rogers, 1969), children know what is right, do what is right, because they care of about doing what is right. Formal schooling as it is currently designed has not set children up for success, yet. As we stated earlier, at 7Cs Academy, we are about 'Growing People' and 'Building Futures.' We ground children in dilemma stories. Dilemma stories will help us achieve the vision of 7Cs Academy and develop socially responsible citizens with *7Cs Curriculum*. This vision will help us fulfill our moral obligation to achieve equity and excellence through free appropriate public education for every child.

### **Collaboration and the G MIRACLES Puzzle**

Dilemma Stories like the sample illustrated earlier anchor 7Cs Curriculum. In this section, we elaborate on the distinctive virtue of *Collaboration* (recall 7Cs Triangle Model) and

the associated performance-based outcome of *Power* that can be unleashed with its mastery. We describe how the whole school community will collaborate to make the Core Principles attainable goals for every child by valuing education as a team sport. To better understand who we include in our team, the following nine stakeholder groups and their roles must be better understood. These nine key stakeholders play a pivotal role in setting every child up for success.

The nine stakeholders are:

1. student,
2. parent,
3. teacher/counselor,
4. principal/school administrator,
5. superintendent/district administrator,
6. board member,
7. business/community member,
8. career pathway partner,
9. state department of education

Earlier we described how the 7Cs Triangle Model represents our outcomes-driven approach to whole child education. The Model fortifies the art of thinking with the science of virtues and the craft of collaboration, mediated by teacher and student creativity. To ensure every child is set up for success on the 7Cs student outcomes and 7Ps performance outcomes, I use teachers as a sample stakeholder group (from Fig. 5) to illustrate how they interact with the 7Cs *Curriculum* and every child. The next section will elaborate on what makes the 7Cs Curriculum special. Students and the 7Cs Curriculum remain central to achieving our Vision. For simplicity, we have shown only one stakeholder (Fig. 4) interacting with students and the Curriculum. We envision the interactions in more dynamic ways to maximize the 700 US billion dollars annual expenditure in PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade public education in the United States.

For these 700 US billion dollars to become an annual investment, people must work together as one determined team. In a determined team, people discover, learn, and figure things

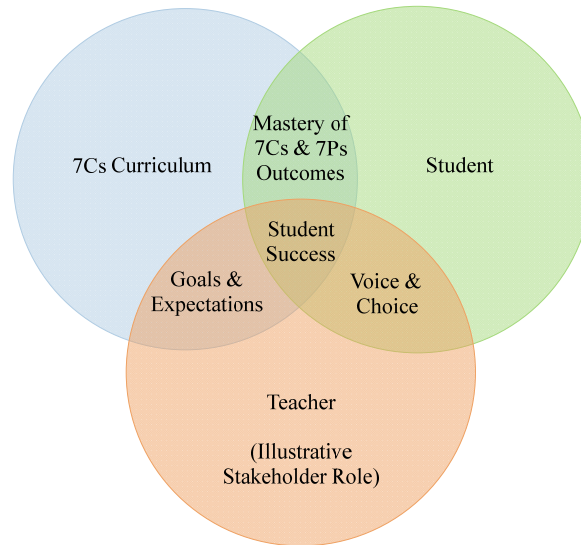


Fig. 4. Teachers as one of eight stakeholder roles supporting student success at 7Cs Academy out. Leaders in the community must spend time planning the journey to achieve the collective aspirations of the team. First, we must show *why* do we do what we do. We demonstrate our unwavering commitment of the team to grow and develop people to benefit and serve students (recall Core Principles and 7Cs Triangle Model). Second, we must institutionalize *how* do we do what we do. We always listen to multiple perspectives to understand the collective needs of our communities. Next, we establish common ground using our organizational strategy. Then we plan and invest resources on our priorities to see how well we are achieving the desired student outcomes. Third, have a clear understanding of *what* do we do. We have a clear identification of roles and responsibilities for everyone on the team and then let people do their work.

We know it takes a village to raise one child. I created “G MIRACLES” puzzle (Fig. 5) in 2017 (<https://HarnessData.com>) to show how different stakeholder groups must collaborate for every child to become successful. The individual tiles of the puzzle represent the nine stakeholder groups that impact student success (listed earlier). Students come first and are denoted number one (#1) and located at the center of the puzzle. This puzzle reinforces my value that students are cherished and are always held at the center of all adult actions. Parents,

Balasubramanian, N. (2020, October). *Setting every child up for success: Developing MASTERS of STREAMS from PreK – Grade 8*. Paper presented at the 46<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Association for Moral Education online.

teachers, principals, and superintendents come next and denoted number two (#2). Board members, business and community members, career pathway partners, and state departments of education are third and denoted number three (#3). Each tile of the puzzle identifies a stakeholder group, and their roles and responsibilities framed as “why, how, and what” to help every child thrive. The first letter under each stakeholder group make the acronym G MIRACLES. For instance, Board Members’ “why, how, and what” would translate to the three G’s of “Grace, Guide, and Govern” for improving student outcomes.

My job is to advocate for every child and help them believe in their aspirations. I will ensure children actively participate in all the learning activities and experience repeated success. That is why students are at the “center” of the puzzle with their three A’s. Collaboration being another bedrock of 7Cs Academy, as CEO, I will continue to create hope and provide opportunities for every stakeholder group to ensure they grow and thrive. I will help stakeholders see everyone’s part in ensuring student success. As stated earlier, ‘Growing People’ and ‘Building Futures’ is the motto of 7CsThrive. My own “why, how, and what” as a charter school administrator would translate into the three E’s of “Empower, Execute, and Excel” to achieve improved student outcomes. I am expected to support and coach all staff, including teachers (with the three I’s); campus administrators (with the three M’s); and other district administrators (with the three E’s). On a weekly basis (until the pandemic created the lockdown in March 2020), we were reminded about huge unmet needs that persisted for most of the disadvantaged families that we are seeking to serve. When we asked them, do you know how the Texas Education Agency rates your child’s district or school? We were surprised. Most families were not aware of the district’s rating. Few were aware of the Agency’s rating of their child’s school. For example, on February 23, 2020, upon learning about how her children’s school was doing

academically, a family responded “*Necesito cambiar escuela*” (“I need to change school”). Supporting parents and guardians with their three C’s is important.

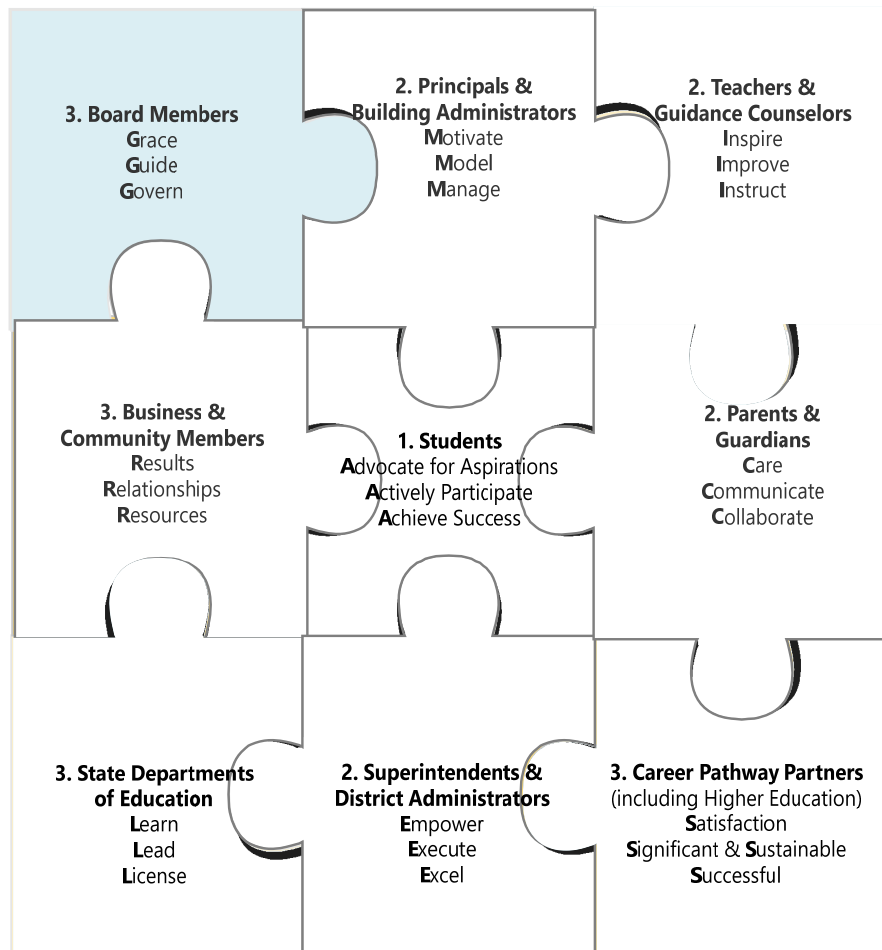


Fig 5. G MIRACLES puzzle, illustrating education as a team sport

As CEO, I am also expected to develop strategic public-private partnerships for the sustainable growth of 7Cs Academy. The three R’s for the business and community members and the three S’s for career pathway partners capture the purpose of these partnerships. Stakeholders would thrive when State Departments of Education and State Board of Education Members have the three-L’s mindset for improving student outcomes in every state. I know that I will continue supporting all nine stakeholder roles by helping each group understand their respective “why, how, and what” in compelling ways.

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The individual tiles in the G MIRACLES clearly identify roles and responsibilities for everyone on the team. Every stakeholder (represented by their respective tile) has important responsibilities. People within each tile must fulfill their responsibility. Figure 4 showed how people across tiles (using student and teacher as examples) must collaborate. As these tiles come together to solve this puzzle, the future of our children begins to become bright and magic happens within every community. I have witnessed this in communities I served across three states, Colorado, Florida, and Texas.

Individuals may serve in multiple roles on the team. Sometimes there is an overlap of responsibilities in relation to other roles. For example, a principal may be a parent. In both roles, they care. It helps when they clearly articulate why and how they think something. Sometimes there is a conflict of responsibilities in relation to other roles. For example, a board member may be a parent. They should not generalize their personal experience as a parent in one school with one teacher to a practice that exists across the entire school system. Yet, all could be working toward the same desired student outcomes. By understanding such tensions, we can overcome persistent challenges in school systems. Understanding the 7Cs Triangle Model will mediate stakeholders' actions toward growth and development on the 7Cs and 7Ps for every child (recall Core Principles and 7Cs Triangle Model).

External threats like the COVID-19 pandemic has brought people and collaboration issues to the hilt. Educators, parents, and students were not prepared for the challenge. It is going to take a lot to thrive in a world of staggering challenges and change past the post-COVID-19 era. Our developmental education model that begins with social emotional character development (SECD) before developing children's competencies is designed for the success of all students, including the at-risk students. Children, who need this trio of knowledge, skills, and

attitudes for their intellectual, human, and moral development do not have such options available to them, yet. SECD can and must be taught and built in children (Kress & Elias, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified these unmet needs.

Suddenly, schools have had to adopt and implement virtual classrooms. This massive disruption of schools, from the traditional brick-and-mortar offerings have led some to claim that homeschooling will set back a generation of students. Others have recommended that students must repeat their 2019-2020 grade in 2020-2021. At the time of writing this paper, schools have not had children face-to-face for six months. Factors outside of school that could begin to be mitigated in a face-to-face setting have been disproportionately accentuated in this crisis. Standardized testing that used to be a major end-of-year undertaking in the United States was suspended for the 2019-2020 year. Students with disabilities, English language learners, gifted learners, and at-risk students have been most adversely impacted. It is our belief that this ongoing crisis demands innovative approaches to better meet the needs of all children.

The crisis presents unique opportunities to mitigate many stubborn challenges. I believe parent engagement with high-quality curriculum and instruction that build on the relationship between teachers and students could become three winners when we emerge from this crisis. Schools used to have challenges with Family and Community Engagement (FACE) in public schools. The crisis has brought teachers into the personal spaces of many families. Educators' empathy with children and their families have begun to grow in this crisis. It has begun to stretch the thinking of teachers and administrators. Teachers are forced to move beyond the comfort of traditional go-to resources like textbooks and worksheets. Teachers have begun thinking seriously about their curriculum.

The main purpose of curriculum is to focus, connect, and ensure equity (described more



in the next section). Teachers are having to focus on the most essential learnings for students to foster higher levels of thinking (rigor) and deep engagement. They are challenged to differentiate instruction for the varied learners in their virtual classrooms. Teachers are having to outline high expectations by providing a compelling way for every child to succeed from the confines of their own homes. I contend that teachers are now primed to reflect on big and essential questions to create more rigorous learning experiences for children. Ritchhart's (2002) asks the big question: "What should we be teaching for?" (p. 8) to be enduring in the lives of children. As Ritchhart asserts, in the long run, children's intellectual character – their "patterns of behavior, patterns of thinking, and patterns of interaction" (Ritchhart, 2002, p. 9) is what will remain in their hearts and minds long after graduating from public schools (recall Sample Dilemma Story, Core Principles and the Triangle Model). Baehr (2015) asks an essential question: "What am I really trying to accomplish?" (p. 7) through the curriculum. By design, as children grow their intellectual, human, and moral character virtues with the Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps), they gain deep understanding of the subject matter. "Deep understanding is complex and demanding. It is hard to acquire. It demands high-level thinking and active intellectual engagement." (Baehr, 2015, p. 32). As we move forward past the COVID-19 crisis, teachers are bound to interact positively in more meaningful and creative ways with students and their families.

Although it was a forced choice, many teachers are enjoying using new tools and technology with the additional time everyone has reclaimed. Teachers will not go back to what they did before this crisis. More teachers recognize now that parents should not feel as blindsided about what students were learning in school. Parents, students, and teachers are actively communicating with one another now that they have seen the benefits of at-home learning with at-school learning. I have been able to share free resources like <http://TexasAssessment.com> and

<https://Quantiles.com> with families to personalize learning for every child (see Volume No. 1 of 7Cs Viewsletter <https://7csacademy.org/7cs-in-the-news>). I predict that teachers will return excited to bring back the joy of learning into their brick-and-mortar classrooms in the future. Teachers are more likely to relinquish control once they return to these classrooms. Students will be able to have greater voice and choice in what they are learning (recall Fig. 4). Additionally, students can take greater ownership for their own learning and become more accountable for their own success in post-COVID-19 brick-and-mortar classrooms because technology-rich learning environments are finally becoming ubiquitous. Flipped classrooms will likely become the new normal. Most teachers would happily create more interactive multimedia lessons using tools like ‘Edpuzzle.’ More teachers will provide choice for students to learn concepts at varying levels of difficulty using tools like ‘Choice boards’ for differentiated instruction. Now that many teachers have tasted the power of having parents and students as educational partners with blended learning models, school will not be the same again.

### **7Cs Curriculum and 7Cs Curriculum Guides**

This section elaborates on the distinctive *Competencies* virtue from our Core Principles. Daily instruction (teaching and learning) at every 7Cs Academy campus will be through a rigorous, competency-based educational model grounded in student expectations (SEs) and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). In addition to increasing choice of learning opportunities for families, Chapter 12 of the Texas Education Code (TEC §12.001), Charters were created for the following purpose: improve student learning; attract new teachers to the public school system; establish a new form of accountability; and encourage different and innovative learning methods in public schools. The goals of 74<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature (1995) remain aspirational after 25 years, when they first authorized Charter Schools in Texas. STAAR

(State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) represents the standardized test we use in Texas. The latest STAAR data (Texas Education Agency, 2019) shows an overwhelming majority of children in San Antonio are unable to demonstrate the knowledge and skills to read, write, compute, problem solve, think critically, apply technology, and communicate across all subject areas.

Poor test scores, even if they are symptomatic, call for systemic solutions. Numerous educators and practitioners have claimed that testing and standardized tests are the bane of public education. Others declare that we should prepare students for the tests of life and *not* a life of tests. The Board of Directors of 7CsThrive and I have a different perspective. We believe that we must prepare children for the tests of life *and* a life of tests. As a proponent of competency-based education, I know of no better way to independently validate the aptitude and intellectual development of students on their literacy and numeracy competencies. At 7Cs Academy, we define literacy and numeracy broadly, going beyond the PreK to eighth grade TEKS. We define (higher-level) literacy as everything humans do to communicate and make meaning of the world. We define (higher-level) numeracy as everything humans do to understand ideas, solve problems, reason mathematically, and transfer learning from one context to another. The Academy's work is preparing students to be literate and numerate in this broad sense. As we deliver on this commitment to families, we know students will meet and exceed grade level expectations as measured by STAAR too.

Curriculum matters. Curriculum is the heart of the instructional core in a classroom. The *written* curriculum should clearly outline high expectations. A quality written curriculum will provide suggestions for how to teach the 7Cs. It will define what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and concepts children are to learn. The 7Cs Academy instructional leadership team will use

Textbooks as supplementary resources and the TEKS Resource System as a curriculum framework to develop the *7Cs Curriculum* and *7Cs Curriculum Guides*. Resources are not curriculum. High-Quality Curriculum and Curriculum Guides will suggest challenging and engaging student learning activities, materials, and resources needed to instruct (i.e., teach and learn). The *taught* curriculum will clearly outline essential student outcomes (recall Fig. 4). The *7Cs Curriculum* will articulate what is to be taught and learned at the appropriate grade levels and in the appropriate courses in every *7Cs Academy* campus. The taught *7Cs Curriculum* will develop deep learning, so children have increased awareness of the *7Cs*. The *tested* curriculum will reveal student mastery. The tested curriculum includes the daily tasks, concepts, and skills children will learn to demonstrate their mastery of the written and taught curriculum. These ideas are grounded in four decades of best practices and research documented by Fenwick English and other licensed curriculum auditors. English and Steffy (2001) describe how deep curriculum alignment also create a level playing field for all students on the high-stakes tests of educational accountability.

Instructional materials matter. Curriculum objectives for children set the direction for achieving the *Mission* of *7Cs Academy*. A complete written curriculum includes documents for every course taught at every grade level in the schools (see *Building Teacher Capacity*). This is known in a curriculum audit as the scope of the written curriculum. A quality written curriculum is an essential tool that provides direction and consistency for teachers in planning classroom instruction. Clear, comprehensive, and current curriculum documents provide direction for teachers regarding learning objectives, assessments, prerequisite knowledge/skills, instructional materials/resources, instructional strategies, and approximate time allocations for mastery of curricular objectives. The quality *7Cs Curriculum* will maximize teaching and learning by

providing comprehensive written Curriculum Guides based on rigorous Curriculum Management Audit Criterion (CMSi, 2020) for rating every *7Cs Curriculum Guide* document by grade and by subject for minimal basic components and their specificity. As a licensed curriculum auditor, I will use the best practices from CMSi to rate our Curriculum Guides. For example, I used this 15-point rubric to rate the *7Cs Curriculum Guides* at Muscatine Community School District (Ferrell, Balasubramanian, et. al., 2020). This rubric rated every content area guide on:

- a) clarity and specificity of objectives;
- b) congruence of the curriculum to assessment processes;
- c) delineation of the prerequisite essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes;
- d) delineation of the major instructional tools; and
- e) clear approaches for classroom use.

This work might appear daunting, but detailed *Project Plans* have been drawn out for our startup year after we transition from a Charter Applicant to become a Charter Holder in 2021.

In addition to high-quality curriculum and curricular guides, we are confident in achieving results because of the innovative structures we have created in our design. Daily class meeting conversations at the beginning, middle, and end of the day for attitude formation and social emotional character development (SECD) of children is another innovative design element. This structured time, three times every day, is designed to build on children's innate curiosity as they learn and master the core and encore curriculum at *7Cs Academy*. Curiosity also happens to be our fourth *Core Value*. We will nurture the active listening and questioning abilities of every student to build their collaborative communication skills. By observing and honing their results-based listening strategies, students will forge long-term relationships with their peers and adults, starting early at *7Cs Academy*.

The Board of Directors and I know student outcomes do not change until adult behaviors change. To model daily class meeting conversations, the President begins our monthly meetings

by always checking-in on all six participants (including herself) with a measure on how everyone was feeling on the Mood Meter. The Mood Meter, a two by two matrix of energy and feeling, was developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence for students and adults to get a pulse on their own feelings. Recognizing people differences can trigger people problems, the Board and I intentionally practice results-based listening. We model everything we expect of our teachers. We identified one another on the People Styles Grid (Fig. 6) by rating one another on an 18-item people styles inventory (Bolton, & Bolton, 2009). Three of us are analytical-expressives and the other three are expressive-analyticals. Since we think, decide, use time, handle emotions, manage stress, communicate, and deal with conflict differently, we have learned to recognize and flex our individual people styles to forge strong relationships with one another and our community. The President always uses the same Mood Meter as we check-out at the end of every meeting.

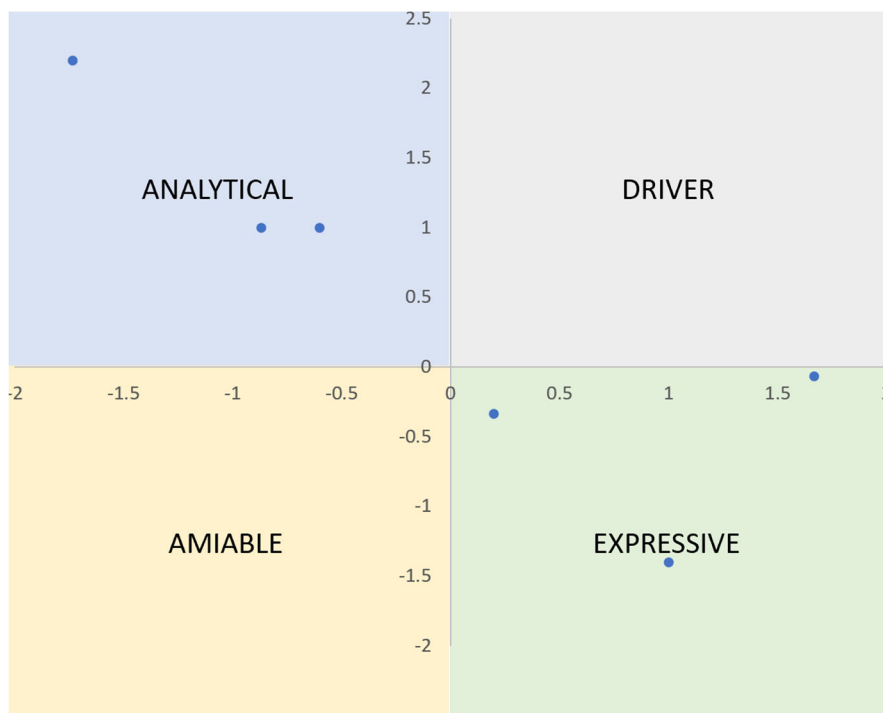


Fig. 6. People Styles Grid of Board and CEO

Core curriculum includes English Language Arts & Reading; Mathematics; Science; and Social Studies. Encore curriculum, which reinforces the Core Curriculum, includes Fine Arts (Music, Arts, & Theater); Health; Physical Education; Technology Applications; and Personal Financial Literacy (Balasubramanian & Wilson, 2007). From the Aristotelian era 2400 years ago to the present times, every parent knows about children's infectious curiosity. Their endless: mom, can I . . . or dad, I wonder why . . . questions can raise the spirits of most adults.

The sample dilemma story presented earlier shows how we anchor STREAMS learning by building on children's curiosity. For over 15 years I have used the *Circle of Time* activity (Balasubramanian, 2006) to help stakeholders in G MIRACLES puzzle understand the importance of time. Except for a handful of people over the years, I have found that every stakeholder group in the population surveyed across the US is surprised to learn that students attend school for only 1/7<sup>th</sup> (14 percent) of the time available in one calendar year. Participants' perceptions varied between 2/7<sup>th</sup> (28 percent) to 5/7<sup>th</sup> (over 70 percent). Families and communities have students 6/7<sup>th</sup> (86 percent) of the time, which is outside the control of schools. Inspiring students and motivating them during the 1/7<sup>th</sup> (14 percent) of the time becomes paramount to ensure they thrive with our Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps).

In addition to dilemma stories, structured daily class meeting times in our innovative schedule will help us design learning experiences for children with the 7Cs Curriculum based on their Class Meeting discussions. The written 7Cs Curriculum requires children to bring their outside-the-classroom 'life issues' into the classroom during their check-in or class meetings. Children will take turns sharing one issue. These issues can be real-life or fictitious: Flint water crisis, challenges paying monthly utility bills, etc. The dilemma stories are designed to foster dialogue and thinking. Students' wisdom perks up as they focus on other people's problems

instead of their own (Grossmann et. al., 2020). Over time, these stories will conclude with scenarios that have clear ‘action choices’ and expert ‘justifications’ to better understand attitude formation and the moral development of children. This is part of my commitment as a measurement researcher to study the intellectual, human, and moral development of students with advanced survey methodology.

After lunch on their daily schedule, children have 15 minutes built into their schedule to document their reflections on their personal *Journals*. Student’s *Journals* may include their drawings, symbolic representations, poems, stories, contemporary issues, family reflections, and follow up research on people, processes, and practices. This is also the time when students build their Project Management competencies. Project Management is the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and resources by students and teachers to complete activities that help them achieve specific learning goals. For example, students will become proficient in using Gantt charts to plan and track their goal accomplishment. Students finish their day strong with 15 minutes of discussions after documenting changes on how they rated themselves on the ‘Mood Meter’ at the beginning and end of the day. One may wonder, if we are dipping into the 1/7<sup>th</sup> (14 percent) of the time that teachers and students have together during a year. Instead, we argue that we have created this innovative structure to spill into the 6/7<sup>th</sup> (86 percent) of the time by drawing children’s families and communities into experiencing the Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps) to achieve their dreams.

Perspectives change when humans think. We have known that absence of problems leads to an absence of thinking (Levitt, 1960). Children’s critical thinking reflects their intellectual development. Children’s problem-solving sums up their human development. Children will be captivated with the dilemma stories and personalized learning at the Academy to improve their



communities because of their moral development. Children's desire to know and understand the way the world is and why it is the way it is (Baehr, 2015) will become infectious (with the daily class meeting conversations). This symbiotic inward and outward focused, growth and developmental mindset is unique to student-centered learning at 7Cs Academy. Every child graduating as an eighth grader from the Academy will fulfil Baehr's (2015) aspirational goals of education. These children will "wonder, think, ask questions, pursue evidence, listen openly to others, probe for understanding, delight in discovery, embrace intellectual challenges, and stand up for what they believe in" (p. 35).

Actively teaching children the 7Cs in the early years and having them practice these character virtues repeatedly will make their intellectual, human, and moral development enduring. Early years at 7Cs Academy refer to ten grade levels: starting in PreK as 4-year old's and ending in Grade 8 as 13-year old's. We know more children are like Severita Lara today. As a four-year old, Severita (nicknamed *cabezuda*, or stubborn, by her mother in 1956), "could make up her own mind and had her own tastes" (Gutiérrez, 2005). We proffer that our developmental education model will better prepare children for success in high school and their careers 20-30 years from today. We are confident about this prediction based on the soundness of our Core Principles (recall 7Cs Triangle Model) and our extensive planning for students to practice their mastery of the Core Principles in their middle school years at the Academy.

Specifically, we have created an academic vocabulary for children with 560 basic words that every PreK child will master. These 560 high-frequency words are basic words of English that come from two or more wordlists we used in our database. Each wordlist was developed by three independent pioneers who champion(ed) excellence in English. The first word list is from the 850 words in Basic English (Ogden, 1930). The second wordlist builds on the insights of

Felix Tijerina and the *League of United Latin American Citizens* (Lopez, 1960). The Little 400 (words), which was expanded to Little 500 in 1959, was superseded by Head Start (Kreneck, 2020). The third word list is from the 1,000 words in EF English First (1988). Children at 7Cs Academy will leverage the power of these words in various ways. Inspired by the Academy's 560 high-frequency words, students and teachers will create short poems like these examples using their creativity. Rudyard Kipling begins *The Elephant Child* (1942):

I keep six honest serving-men  
They taught me all I knew;  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

The second example was composed for me by (Late) Professor Gnanapragasam (1983), 37 years ago. I still vividly recall how Professor Gnanapragasam crafted this poem spontaneously and wrote it beautifully using his calligraphic pens on my book! Professor Gnanapragasam first asked me for a word, so he can showcase his poetry composing prowess. The word I gave him was “second” and he instinctively titled his poem, *Be No Second*.

Let every second  
Be used profitably.  
To none you will be second  
Riding life cheerfully.

80 percent of the words in the poem *Be No Second* comes from the Academy's 560 high-frequency word list.

7Cs high-frequency word list will also help mitigate the *academic literacy gap* that manifests as the 30-million-word gap by age three (Hart & Risley, 2003) between children who are economically disadvantaged (over 90 percent of our projected enrollment) and their more affluent peers based on children's cumulative experience over four years. As researchers at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Colker, 2014) discovered, “children

in different socio-economic groups display dramatic differences in their vocabularies” by 18 months! Similarly, the academic numeracy gap manifests itself through a lack of concrete math facts/computational skills and math process skills. To better serve children attending 7Cs Academy and to prevent the gaps of these children from compounding over time, educators will quickly close academic gaps in literacy and numeracy (PreK-2) in our first year of operation (2022-23) at the primary grades. As educators, we will close the gaps between English learners, children with disabilities, gifted children, and at-risk students by identifying individual student needs and addressing them immediately. Relying on the first component of Designing Learning 2.0, we know both the closing of academic gaps and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of individual learners will be guaranteed.

In addition to the numerous benefits articulated above, the written 7Cs Curriculum will also help us add to extant literature on character education to build on the Aristotelian idea of *phronesis* (‘practical wisdom’ or ‘good sense’). When two or more virtues collide, *phronesis* helps virtuous people choose wisely between the alternatives with a good sense checklist (see Arthur et. al, 2017, Table 9.2). The collaboration between 7Cs Academy and our Advisory Team Members will also help us better understand and apply the basic principles of attitude formation and change to develop socially responsible citizens.

Earlier, we described why children shaped by experiences of marginalization associated with social and economic inequities “come to school with both developmental risks and benefits” (Mercado, 2016). Having experienced first-hand the challenges that children face in disadvantaged communities, teachers have developed increased empathy for these students and started establishing stronger relationships. By design, the developmental education model of 7Cs will better prepare children for success because it prioritizes children’s well-being while

simultaneously honoring the cultural wealth of their communities (Yosso, 2005). Imagine what children will be able to do and become, after we help them master the Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps).

Our educational philosophy maximizes student success by blending social emotional character development with competency-based education. We know that the values and beliefs of educators make a difference in delivering SEMI outcomes (recall Inequities in Education). The late CEO of Southwest Airlines, Herb Kelleher, articulated our thinking best: “I hire for attitude and train for aptitude.” We are determined to hire people who see the world the way we do in our educational non-profit (<https://7CsAcademy.org>). Using the Kolbe Assessments to identify their strengths, we will identify and build on the Instinct-based Strengths for Learning and Wellness of teams of teachers. The section titled ‘Building Teacher Capacity’ next elaborates on how we would build teacher capacity to ensure all children, including students from disadvantaged communities thrive.

### **Building Teacher Capacity**

Much is expected of the instructional and non-instructional staff at 7Cs Academy. They need to be proficient in the Core Principles (7Cs Triangle Model); they must help every child demonstrate the mastery of STREAMS/TEKS by delivering every day, high-quality instruction using 7Cs Curriculum Guides; they must develop SECD competencies in every child, and so much more. Intentions matter. We are clear about what we want ALL students (and eventually adults) to know, to be able to do, and understand why? Actions matter. We are clear on how we will deliver on our intentions every day—through high-quality instruction with monitoring of progress and personalized support provided to every child. Attitudes matter. We know we cannot do this alone. We will engage the whole school community in this transformational teaching and

learning experience (recall Collaboration and G MIRACLES section). With such high expectations for all staff, we decided early on to grow our own talent. We will hire staff for their attitude and train them to build on their expertise throughout the school year to advance through the school system on their personalized career trajectories. We have scheduled time to train and develop the expertise of staff with our innovative School Calendar (<https://7csacademy.org/proposed-school-calendar>).

Master teachers will first learn how to design engaging lessons and develop comprehensive unit lesson plans (see sample [http://www.doers.us/Sample\\_Unit\\_Planner.html](http://www.doers.us/Sample_Unit_Planner.html)), in a team setting, for every core subject area during our planning year (2021-22). Although the sample unit planner is illustrated here with a high school example, we have found the principles of the Designing Learning model to be highly effective for all grade levels and every stakeholder group. What contributed to the two or more years of growth a year with the Designing Learning model was (a) Intentionality (b) Growth mindset (c) Emphasis on writing and critical thinking (d) Value-added inquiry (e) Formative assessment practices (f) Backwards design approach (g) Metacognition (Balasubramanian, Frieler, Asp, 2008).

Our teachers will also be trained to draw on children's developmental assets to create more rigorous learning experiences in blended classrooms at 7Cs Academy. We use the 40 developmental assets of the search institute (<https://www.search-institute.org/>) as the building blocks for healthy child development. The Search Institute (2009) has these 40 developmental assets articulated by age groups: ages 3-5; ages 5-9; ages 8-12 and beyond. The Institute also has the 40 assets available in Spanish and 15 other languages. These assets are designed to provide for student's needs in eight areas with sustained support; empowerment; boundaries and expectations; constructive use of time; commitment to learning; positive values; social

competencies; and positive identity. We described earlier how everything in our Academy is grounded in intellectual, human, and moral character development.

As we engaged the community, we asked them about the values that they would like our school to be teaching or reinforcing. Ten leading candidates for the values as expressed by families at our face-to-face meetings (Academy Survey, 2020) were compassion, kindness, global citizenship, community, languages, open mindedness, respect, responsibility, working hard, and STEM. Baehr (2015) would appreciate these values of our families because they teach what he calls intellectual, civic, and moral character virtues like curiosity, attentiveness, intellectual humility, intellectual courage, responsibility, global citizenship, kindness, compassion, and open-mindedness that bring meaning and purpose to education. With love of family and community, these values are also consistent with additive schooling and authentic caring pedagogy (Valenzuela, 1999). At the current time, our core values are graciousness, resilience, accountability, curiosity, and excellence. We will codify the nonnegotiable values of 7Cs Academy by bringing our community of stakeholders together in the months using a virtual charrette process.

The Board of Directors and I are determined to better prepare teachers with stories of Mexican American leaders like Severita Lara who have deep connections to the community we wish to serve in San Antonio. Identifying with Mayor Lara's real-life events and embedded dilemma stories in the book (Gutiérrez, 2005), teachers can integrate issues of identity, language differences, learning differences, culture, and power in their everyday curriculum.

To summarize, we build teacher capacity at the Academy using a three-tier Professional Development Model (Fig. 7). The model is designed to maximize student success by personalizing learning for every child. Each tier in this model illustrates the *why*, *how*, and *what*.

Developing new skillsets and mindsets with the 7Cs Triangle Model is the first tier in our PD model. The first tier addresses the question: What do we want ALL learners to know, to be able to do, and understand why? (recall Core Principles and 7Cs Triangle Model). When children understand why they are learning STREAMS in authentic and creative ways, “they are more likely to take the lessons of such learning to heart” (Carr & Harrison, 2015, p. 157).

The detailed *written, taught, and tested* 7Cs Curriculum is the second tier in our PD model. The second tier addresses the question: How will we teach this and how will we know children are growing in their expertise on the distinctive 7Cs virtues? (recall 7Cs Curriculum and 7Cs

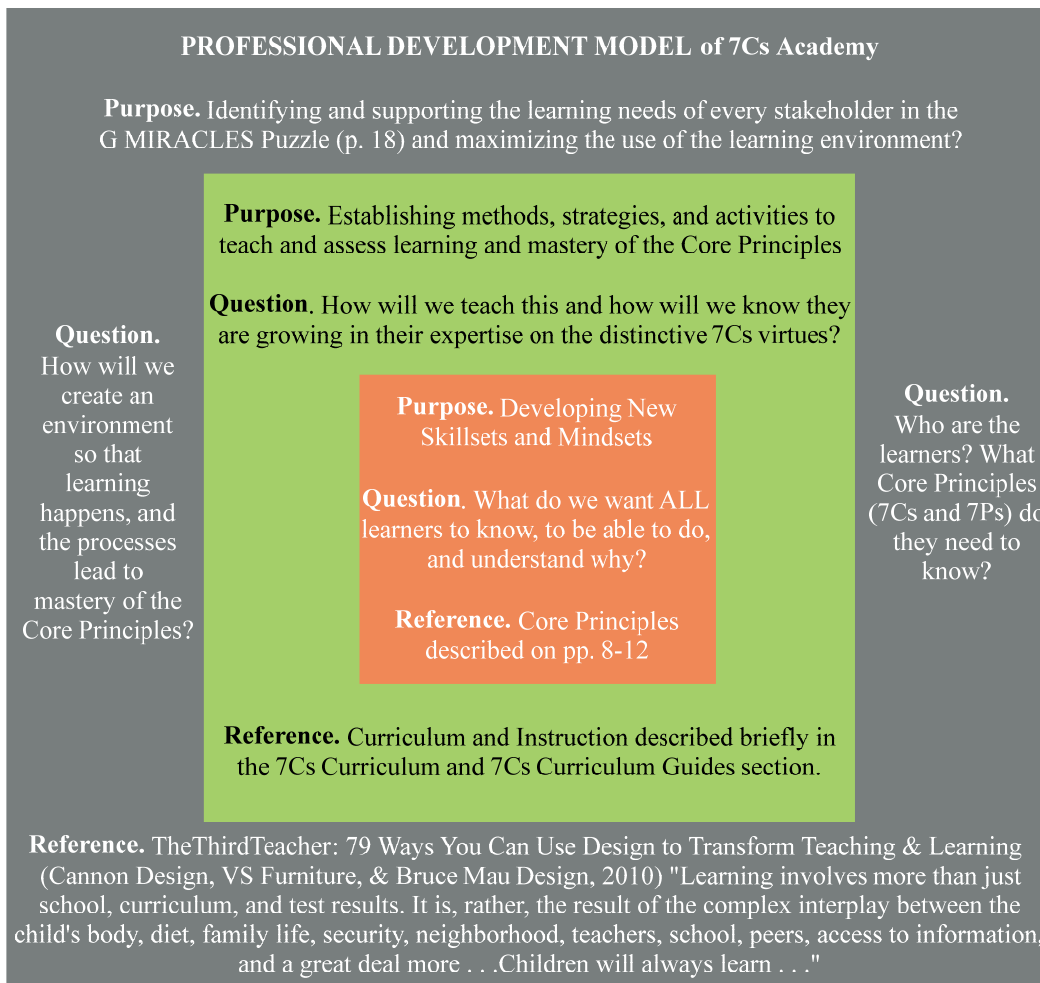


Fig. 7. Three-tier professional development model

Curriculum Guides). When teachers use textbooks as the de facto curriculum, they are unable to  
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differentiate instruction for the varied learners in every classroom. The detailed *Project Plans* submitted with our Charter Application outlines specifics on how all the programs, including the 7Cs curriculum, and the 7Cs curriculum guides will be in place to deliver high quality instruction from August 2022 at the Academy. The 7Cs Curriculum Guides for the core and encore curriculum will document our fully established methods, strategies, and activities to teach and assess the mastery of the Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps).

Identifying and supporting the learning needs of every stakeholder group in G MIRACLES puzzle is the third tier that binds our professional development (PD) model. It is designed to maximize student success by personalizing learning for every child. The third tier addresses the questions: Who are the learners? What Core Principles do they need to know? How will we create an environment so that learning happens, and the practices lead to mastery of the Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps)? The reference cited in the third tier of our professional development model captures our values and beliefs (recall Core Principles and 7Cs Triangle Model).

We are encouraged by many of the 7Cs higher-level literacy outcomes that my fellow educators and I have consistently delivered with multiple stakeholder groups across multiple grade levels using the Designing Learning model since 2005. The higher-level literacy outcomes include critical thinking, problem solving, mathematical reasoning, inference making, and visualization/modeling. I pilot tested this model in at a Title I (high poverty) middle school in 2005. In all the classes I “taught,” I obtained accelerated learning for all students, including underrepresented students in STEM. My students made two or more years of academic growth in one semester. I replicated this success with underrepresented Title I high school students. Additionally, the 13 teachers I trained from the four core subject areas at this high school



achieved similar academic gains of two or more years of growth in one semester using this instructional model (Balasubramanian, Frieler, & Asp, 2008). You have seen the evolution of Designing Learning (DL) into the Designing Learning 2.0 (DL 2.0) as described in this manuscript.

We are also encouraged with the alignment of 7Cs intellectual, human, and moral character virtues and the 7Ps performance outcomes described earlier with the four character virtues of the Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues (Arthur et. al., 2017). The four areas they define (pp. 185-186) for teacher educators are intellectual virtues, civic virtues, moral virtues, and performance virtues. We look forward to digging deeper into our 7Cs using their Character Development Ladder with its four levels: moral indifference, emerging self-control, self-control, and virtue. Arthur et. al. (2017) have clearly articulated the challenges with measuring moral character virtues. In describing our Core Principles earlier, we stated that everyone will model the 7Cs mindset as educators leading this work. The Board of Directors begin monthly meetings with this pledge (recall 7Cs Triangle Model).

At 7Cs Academy, we are on a mission to inspire every student to think critically, solve problems, and seek to improve their communities. We listen and lead for student success. We believe in whole child education. We prepare students with the right attitudes, knowledge, and skills for their tests of life.

To help us continuously improve in the design and delivery of 7Cs Curriculum, we use the research of Buckingham and Goodall (2019) to better quantify the baseline and growth of everyone's 7Cs, including their human character virtues. For example, we would not ask Juanita, a 7Cs Academy employee, to rate another employee, Pedro's communication skills. From Buckingham and Goodall's research, we know people cannot reliably rate other people. Instead, we might ask Juanita the question: When Pedro speaks, do you understand what he means? We would not ask Juanita to rate Pedro's collaboration skills. We might ask Juanita: Do you choose

to work with Pedro as much as you possibly can? The data we begin to quantify will be much more reliable now because people can reliably rate their own experience.

At 7CsThrive, we believe the Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu, was correct when he called out the interdependencies between strategy and tactics: Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory, Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat. Our three-tier professional development model briefly described in Fig. 7 shows how we will achieve our lofty goals with aligned strategy and tactics. The three tiers guide the learning activities for all professional learning and continuous improvement of every staff at the school.

### **What Success Would Look Like**

Our plans provide innovative solutions to address stubborn educational challenges that have been amplified with the COVID-19 pandemic. The previous sections described how we prepare teachers to succeed with high achievement and academic growth for every child in the post-COVID-19 era. In addition to our Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps), we use the simplified graphic (Fig. 8) to show how we will use data from a myriad of sources to set every child up for success. Data and evidence from multiple sources include attendance and behavior data; state, district, and school assessment data; and student engagement and classroom grade data.

We noted earlier that the COVID-19 pandemic has grown educators' empathy with students and their families. It has stretched the thinking of teachers and administrators. Educators must start systemically capturing family history (starting with parents' level of education and documented schools' interactions with families) to inform personalized learning. I know teachers will come back excited to bring back the joy of learning into their brick-and-mortar classrooms. I am now more convinced that educators will embrace free resources that include <http://TexasAssessment.com> and <https://Quantiles.com> to personalize learning for every child.

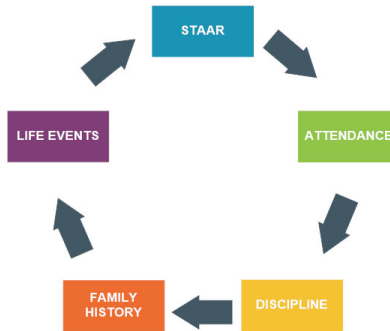


Fig. 8. Personalized learning to set every child up for success

They are more acutely aware of the varying levels of readiness and abilities in every classroom. Unfortunately, with increased pressure to deliver improved student outcomes, too many educators had put the “cart in front of the horse” prior to the pandemic. We have described how we can now “put the horse before the cart” by prioritizing children’s well-being first to set them up for success every day. The strategy we just outlined is not very different from what a dentist would do when you go to them with a toothache. The dentist will diligently follow a differential diagnosis process to address the toothache.

First, the dentist asks questions to understand the patient’s health history, because the health history or medical condition like sinuses can affect the tooth. Second, they begin to ask questions about the symptoms: What makes the tooth sensitive? Which tooth do you think it is? Third, they may take an x-ray. An x-ray clearly is not a 100 percent diagnosing tool (just like a standardized test). It’s only helpful for a diagnosis. The x-ray might provide direction on what may be going on or maybe not. Fourth, they take a clinical look in the mouth. Are there cracks? How much decay is in the mouth? Then, they may then tap on the tooth, spray air, cold water, or hot water on the tooth. With these steps, and using this body of evidence, the dentist may diagnose up to 95 percent of the root cause to address the toothache.

Personalizing learning and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students become accelerated when educators continuously respond to these four prompts in every classroom: a) how many children are on grade level? b) how many children are ahead? c) how many children are behind? and d) how far behind are these children? We noted at the beginning of this paper that after investing 14 trillion US dollars over two decades and having an

abundance of data at the student level in the United States, student educational outcomes has continued to remain flat. We elaborated earlier on how we would accelerate the learning for every subgroup of students by two or more years using the Designing Learning model (Balasubramanian, Frieler, & Asp, 2008).

Besides a lack of high-quality curriculum in the United States (which 7Cs Curriculum and 7Cs Curriculum Guides would begin to fix), another major contributor to our problems has been a lack of data literacy: the data ‘baby’ was thrown out with plenty of actionable ‘bath water,’ particularly by my fellow educators. This is what I call the DRIP and DRAPE constraints in the graphic (Fig. 9). DRIP stands for Data Rich & Information Poor while DRAPE refers to Data Rich & Action Poor Educators. Educators have tended to ignore past performance because of DRIP and DRAPE constraints by alleging the data from prior year performance is as good as “stale donuts.” Figures 8 and 9 show compelling ways in which we can use a body of evidence (data) from multiple sources to improve student outcomes. We are determined to stop the “data”

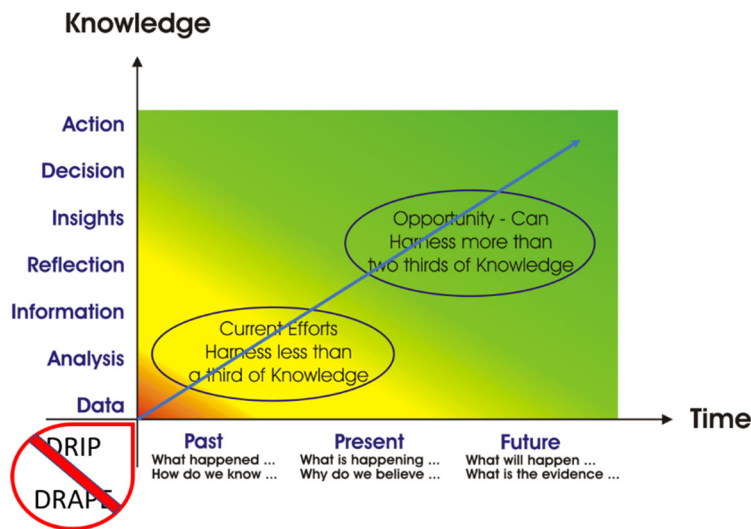


Fig. 9. Data analytics to transform public education

waste and help fellow educators move up the “knowledge” continuum with actionable data to move schools from the red zone to the green zone with their more reflective practices over time.

To be consistent with researchers from artificial intelligence (AI), Fig. 9 does not capture the wisdom that people in 7Cs Academy will develop. As Grossmann et. al. (2020) note, the knowledge continuum on the vertical axis (Fig. 9) follows the DIKW hierarchy to represent the progression from Data, Information, Knowledge, to Wisdom. Upon successful analysis of data, reflective practitioners who are metacognitive can begin to use the information gleaned to answer questions from the past, to move into the present, and/or future (as illustrated in Fig. 9). Knowledge and the interactions with the questions on the horizontal axis depends on the context of the questions (Fig. 9) and the associated answers. Wisdom though (not represented in Fig. 9) depends on values, like the core values of 7Cs Academy. As noted earlier, the Advisory Board and I will use advanced survey methodology techniques to begin to measure the development of wisdom of students by evaluating the ‘action choices’ and expert ‘justifications’ on the dilemma stories to better understand their attitude formation and moral grounding. We know that the reflection of students in their journals and their moral grounding through active listening of the life issues of other students at their daily check-in meetings at the Academy will also result in “far transfer.” (Grossmann et. al., 2020).

Student outcomes will not change unless adult behavior changes. I predict that flipped classrooms, for example, are bound to become another new normal with stronger parent-student-teacher relationships. This will set every child up for success. I am convinced that as educators, we will build on our collective wisdom to come out stronger with the performance-based student outcomes on the other side of this COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate student educational outcomes are the mastery of “7Cs,” Citizenship, Creativity, Character, Critical thinking, Competencies, Communication, and Collaboration. The long-term, performance-based student outcomes or “7Ps” are People, Passion, Positive outlook, Purpose, Process, Persuasiveness, and

Power. The stakeholders of 7CsThrive are determined to be the Bannister's and Kipchoge's (Balasubramanian, 2019) of public education who eliminate the stubborn achievement gaps in schools by empowering students with these 7Cs and the 7Ps early in their lives.

### **Next Steps and Conclusion**

The Board of Directors of 7CsThrive and I have come a long way in 10 short months as new entrants in the public charter school sector. We believe that the ideas presented in this paper are foundational to transforming public education in Texas and beyond. The Texas Education Agency is expected to release the Generation 26 Request for Application (RFA) very soon. We are committed to growing our own talent with the partnerships that we have created this past year. We stated earlier that we will hire our staff for their attitude and then train them on their aptitude. After hiring people with the right attitude, we will build their capacity to see the world the way we do with our sustained and immersive three-tier professional development model (briefly described earlier). Empowering educators with these foundational ideas are not predicated on the award of a charter. Surely, the charter would accelerate the development of the 7Cs Curriculum and the dissemination of these ideas.

Some might wonder if this as a nice concept paper and question if we can deliver on the promising outcomes of “7Cs and 7Ps” outlined earlier (Core Principles and the 7Cs Triangle Model). This is a legitimate question. The coherent and well-articulated ideas presented in this paper along with our progress we made in response to the Generation 25 RFA through their rigorous Charter Authorization process in Texas is just the first mile in our marathon. We have articulated how Collaboration with the G MIRACLES will ensure students achieve immediate and improved educational outcomes with their mastery of “7Cs.” Citizenship, Creativity, Character, Critical thinking, Competencies, Communication, and Collaboration. We also

described earlier how we started with the end in mind and mapped out the 7Cs to the 7Ps—our long-term, performance-based student outcomes. The long-term, performance-based student outcomes or “7Ps” are People, Passion, Positive outlook, Purpose, Process, Persuasiveness, and Power. Contrast our clear outcomes with the “unhelpfully vague” (p. 14) aspirations of educational authorities from around the world who wish to achieve beyond high PISA outcomes (Kristjánsson, 2020). As discussed in this paper, the graphic (Fig. 10) provides an overview of how we will deliver world-class education to better serve the needs of disadvantaged students in San Antonio, Texas.

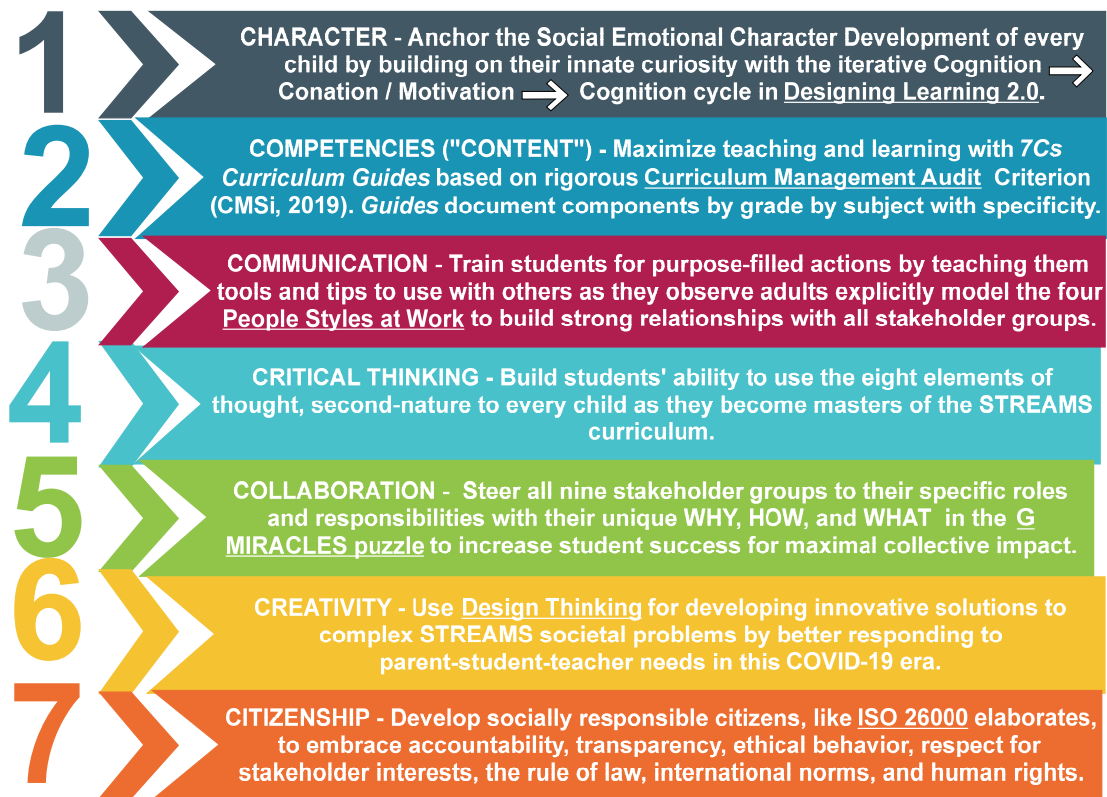


Fig. 10. Whole child education at 7Cs Academy

Additionally, we are encouraged by many of the 7Cs outcomes that my fellow educators and I have consistently delivered on higher-level literacy skills across multiple grade levels using the *Designing Learning* model (recall from *Building Teacher Capacity*). Next, we are encouraged

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by similar outcomes achieved by our Advisory Team on this project. To highlight a few: the improved student educational outcomes of the Intellectual Virtues Academy (IVA) in Long Beach, California by Professor Jason Baehr and his team is encouraging (check out their success story at <http://www.ivalongbeach.org/>). The global success of the Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues in Birmingham, United Kingdom is noteworthy. We are excited about the support of the world's largest academic research center on character, virtues, and citizenship to our project with Professor Kristján Kristjánsson's leadership. Having the guidance of Professor Marvin Berkowitz, the leading international figure in the field of character education and school reform is priceless (recall Sample Dilemma Story). Professor Igor Grossmann brings a wealth of insights from fellow wisdom researchers to our Advisory Team. The collective wisdom of decades of research and practice from these four scholars and their teams will be leading voices to ensure we deliver the "7Cs and 7Ps" educational and performance-based outcomes for the children of San Antonio with the 7Cs Curriculum and 7Cs Curriculum Guides.

The 7Cs Triangle Model is not constrained by the conventional model of brick-and-mortar schooling. Every country can and should educate the whole child. By taking care of student's well-being first, our developmental educational model will ensure that every child is successful. The achievement gaps that exist in public education should no longer be persistent and predictable. We respect and value the diversity of views and ideas to increase equity and opportunity for every child. We have shared plenty of ideas for fellow researchers to explore and implement in this paper. By intentionally transforming groups of people (stakeholders) into exceptional and great teams through *Collaboration* (recall G MIRACLES puzzle), I know we can work together to achieve improved student outcomes that are significantly greater than the sum of our individual efforts. Every child can grow and thrive in strong public schools by



developing socially responsible citizens. Every community can and should grow and thrive in this world with these Core Principles (7Cs and 7Ps).

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